

Addressing Street-Level Drug Markets Dr. Cynthia Lum¹

Thank you Senator Webb and your staff for giving me the opportunity to participate in this panel on street level drug enforcement strategies. The information I've prepared for you today is divided into three brief sections. First, what does the scientific research evidence show are effective law enforcement strategies to reduce drug market activity? Second, given this knowledge, what changes do police need to make to move towards those efforts? Finally, what can Congress do to facilitate these local law enforcement goals? To address these three areas, I will draw on both existing research evidence and also my experience policing drugs at the street-level in Baltimore City.

So to begin, what has research taught us about effective street-level drug enforcement strategies?

It is important to emphasize at the outset that there is often a gap between the tactics regularly used by the police and those that have been shown to be effective in reducing street-level drug markets. While there may be a few exceptions to this, most local drug enforcement is usually carried out by officers who react to crimes that have already occurred. Officers tend to rely on their individual perceptions, on calls for service from citizens, and on informant tips, to conduct case by case investigations, impromptu operations and arrests, crackdowns, or raids. Yet, while some of these tactics may result in arrests and seizures, evidence has shown these approaches to have, overall, a negligible effect on drug availability, violence related to the drug market, intensity of selling or addiction, and treatment of post-released offenders.²

On the contrary, tactics that have been shown to be effective in reducing street-level drug markets depart from these activities and have two very proactive characteristics: they are geographically specific and problem-oriented.³ Geographic specificity refers to the target of the enforcement. We know crime is highly concentrated at very small places— over 50% of a city's crime tends to occur in less than 3% of all its addresses.⁴ Likewise, the evidence is strong that when police target these micro-level hot spots of crime, they can have a significant impact on the overall crime rate of the entire city.⁵ This approach differs from the more common policing strategies which tend to occur at larger geographic aggregations such as entire police beats or neighborhoods, or which focus on investigating single individuals or incidents.

The second requirement of effective drug enforcement intervention follows from the first - a problem orientation. The term problem-oriented means to address the underlying factors that facilitate the drug market rather than its symptoms or consequences. Again, this departs from current practices, which tend to focus on arresting people involved in the market and not on eliminating opportunities for illicit activity in the market. Arrest is useless if opportunities remain, as market actors are easily replaced.

Successful problem-oriented approaches against street level drug markets have used such tactics as nuisance abatement laws to force drug dealing individuals from their residences which they are using as distribution locations. Other successful strategies have used multi-pronged approaches that involve both directed police action, such as hot spot patrols, AND mechanisms

to manipulate the physical environment. For instance, past physical environment interventions have included removing trash in alleyways, boarding or removing vacant buildings or homes, increasing sanitation in a neighborhood, removing obstacles that block pedestrian and police movement, and changing entry and exit points in and out of streets. Research indicates these types of environmental hazards can either facilitate drug market transactions or reduce social capital, both of which can lead to less formal and informal social control of an area, and subsequently less crime prevention opportunities.

As one can imagine, these problem oriented approaches require collaboration between the police and other agencies, which is also a non-traditional approach. Such collaborations with district and states attorneys, regulation and code agencies, city planners, probation and parole, as well as pre-trial and post release treatment services make these strategies and tactics possible.⁶

Given this evidence, what changes in policing can achieve this type of approach?

There is much to discuss here, but again I will be brief: Effective, evidence-based, problem-oriented geographically specific strategies require a strong crime analysis capability – and I am not referring here to traditional intelligence gathering which is something different. Crime analysis is a new development and is currently, even in larger agencies, one of the smallest and least supported functions of the police, if it exists at all. Strengthening the capacity for an agency to conduct statistical, geographic, and criminological trend analysis, should be a priority in an agency attempting to move towards a proactive preventative paradigm.

Secondly, multi-agency approaches must move beyond cooperative agreements or memos of understanding. Agencies must substantively identify and create systemic mechanisms that help to facilitate specific aspects of problem solving between the police and non-law enforcement organizations.

Third, police leadership need to make a conscious effort to change their mentality and organizational culture in responding to crime by advocating and training their officers in a more proactive, analytically driven, evidence-based way, as opposed to a traditional, reactive, or anecdotal-based approach.

Finally, what can Congress do to facilitate this type of evidence-based drug enforcement?

Simply putting more officers on the street to make more arrests will not help, if police don't change their tactics in the ways noted, hire crime analysts and criminologists, or make operationalizing such analysis at the street level a regular practice. Accomplishing this change requires a fundamental evolution in the police approach.

To achieve this, the federal government needs to support those government agencies which play a leadership and guidance role in pushing for such change, most importantly, the National Institute of Justice and the Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention. However, to reiterate Dr. Al Blumstein's words at the most recent Senate Judiciary Hearing on violent crime: what has happened to the funding and direction of the National Institute of Justice has been "shameful".⁷ Its budget to address our many problems within the criminal justice system and to

serve as a guide to agencies seeking help is currently \$50 million. As Blumstein testified, compare this to the National Institute of Dental Research whose budget is \$400 million.

Returning the NIJ and OJJDP to its fully funded state should be a Congressional priority in terms of crime reduction. Not only does the NIJ fund evaluation research, it takes a key leadership and guidance role in disseminating that evidence to justice agencies and to the public, provides technical assistance and training on how to achieve evidence-based approaches, and also serves to balance and moderate the moral panic and fear that often drives public opinion and policy about crime. Furthermore, returning NIJ's lens back to the daily concerns of crime and justice agency legitimacy is imperative, as there are so many important aspects of addressing drugs at the local level, as Dr. Taxman will discuss, that go beyond policing.

Thank you.

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² Sherman, L., Farrington, D., Welsh, B. and MacKenzie, D. (Eds.) (2002). *Evidence Based Crime Prevention*. London, UK: Routledge.

³ Dr. Lorraine Mazerolle has reviewed this evidence in a Campbell Systematic Review, which can be obtained at http://www.campbellcollaboration.org/campbell_library/index.php.

⁴ Sherman, L., Gartin, P. and Buerger, M. (1989). Hot Spots of Predatory Crime: Routine Activities and the Criminology of Place. *Criminology* 27: 27-56. See also Weisburd, D., Bushway, S., Lum, C. and Yang, S. (2004). Trajectories of Crime at Places: A Longitudinal Study of Street Segments in the City of Seattle. *Criminology* 42(2): 283-322.

⁵ Weisburd, D. (2002). From criminals to criminal contexts: Reorienting criminal justice research and policy. *Advances in Criminological Theory*, 10, 197-216.

⁶ Again, for specific studies, see Dr. Mazerolle's review (note 3, above).

⁷ Blumstein, A. (2008). Testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee (September 10, 2008). http://judiciary.senate.gov/pdf/08-09-10Blumstein_Testimony.pdf